

# Record

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**DECISIONS** — Shonn Keels (center stage) of Texas-based Team Impact holds an altar call as fellow strong men Chip Minton (left stage) and Marc Minter look on during the December 29 session of the annual Youth Evangelism Challenge in A.E. Wood Coliseum on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

## Team Impact impacts YEC

By William H. Perkins Jr.  
Editor

The annual Mississippi Baptist Youth Evangelism Challenge (YEC) brought a message of salvation and faith in Jesus Christ to more than 1,100 young people Dec. 29-30 at A.E. Wood Coliseum on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton, in a most unusual way.

Members of Team Impact, a Texas-based Christian ministry that showcases feats of physical power and strength to the glory of God, put on a show that few attendees will soon forget. Teams Impact members Shonn Keels, Chip Minton, and Marc Minter crushed stacks of concrete blocks into dust, snapped regulation baseball bats (wood and metal) like toothpicks, rolled up a heavy kitchen skillet, and twisted open spewing soft drink cans — all with their bare hands.

Each Team Impact member also shared his testimony of coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and invited the young people in attendance to accept Jesus.

"It was a joy to see so many young people come forward to make a decision that will affect them spiritually for the rest of their lives. Team Impact, along with outstanding speakers and worship times, made this a very memorable YEC," said Don Lum, evangelism director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, which sponsored the conference along with Mississippi College.

Speakers included:

- Paul Barnard, pastor of Overflow Church, Magee.

- Justin and Bethany Pigott, Fellowship of Christian Athletes leaders at Mississippi College in Clinton.

- Mark Roberts of First Priority of America in Orlando.

The Nolan Bishop Family Band of Magee provided praise and worship.

Coordinating the event were Shannon Slover, minister of youth at First Church, Laurel, and Brad Van Cleave, minister of youth at First Church, Magee. Joining them on the planning committee were Eric Bean of First Church, Purvis; Kenny Walters of Northcrest Church, Meridian; Brandon Lewis of First Church, Oxford; Chris Robbins of Main Street Church, Hattiesburg; Dustin Long of First Church, Mathiston; Duncan Tucker of Pelahatchie; and Jeremy Burnham of Florence.

The 2012 Youth Evangelism Challenge will be held December 27-28 at Mississippi College in Clinton. For more information, contact the MBCB Evangelism Department at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3278 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 278. E-mail: jellis@mbcb.org.

Lum encouraged Mississippi Baptist churches to get involved with YEC. "A church with five members in the youth group can get together, make a motel reservation, and attend two days of worship, praise, and teaching with a thousand other young people at a reasonable cost per student," he said.



**RAW POWER** — Team Impact member Marc Minter demolishes a stack of concrete blocks at the December 29 session of the annual Youth Evangelism Challenge in A.E. Wood Coliseum on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)



## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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# Get ready, stay ready

As if the financial crisis in the U.S. isn't enough to make us lose sleep nightly, it appears likely the Middle East will soon erupt into the headlines once again. Iran's not-so-idle threat to block the vital Strait of Hormuz brings to mind once again the preponderance of problems in that area of the world that continue to demand a prominent place on the world stage.

At the confluence of what academics call the Great Religions of the World (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), the Middle East has always seethed with intractable violence and political/religious intrigue. Mix that age-old problem with the world's unslakable thirst for oil — the dwindling remainder of which is overwhelmingly located in the Middle East — and an abundant supply of high-tech weaponry, and the potential is for tragedy on a scale we have never before seen.

It's a bad neighborhood and no one's record in the Middle East is without blemish, but it does appear that the Jewish state of Israel will once again be forced to defend itself against increasingly-sophisticated attacks from rump Islamic terrorist groups like Hezbollah that operate from nearby countries like Lebanon. Those groups are in turn heavily supported by countries like Syria and Iran, which widens any conflict and threatens to engulf the entire region in all-out war.

Several years ago, an air strike widely credited to the Israelis destroyed a suspected Syrian nuclear development site. Many observers believe it is only a mat-

ter of time before Israel is forced to take out similar Iranian facilities in the name of self-preservation.

If war indeed comes to the Middle East, countries outside the region with "interests" will undoubtedly feel compelled to become involved, and whatever actions they take are not likely to lead to a lessening of tensions. Modern convention weapons are capable of inflicting tremendous suffering and pain, but policymakers and war planners now must factor in the possible introduction of nuclear weapons.

Is all this beginning to sound like Armageddon? If so, we would not be the first generation to believe we are living in the Last Days.

When a lightning strike set off a massive fire in the virgin forests of the northeastern U.S., smoke so blackened the sky that Puritans downwind concluded the lack of daylight was a sign the Lord was on His way back. During the devastation of World War I, reports circulated that the German leader Kaiser Wilhelm II was the much-anticipated antichrist and the end was near. Virtually the same was said about Adolph Hitler during World War II.

In our own day, we have had Edgar Whisenant's 88 Reasons Why Rapture Could be in 1988, which sold more than 4.5 million copies. When Rapture didn't come in 1988, he conveniently wrote the follow up, Rapture Report 1989. Failing again to correctly date the Rapture, Whisenant updated his predictions every year through 1994 before apparently giving up.

We should keep Whisenant's story in mind when we are told this time, as we no doubt will be, that the end is near because of world events currently tran-

spiring in the Middle East and around the world. Instead of succumbing to the hystericism, we should simply resort to the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:36-44 (NIV):

*"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."*

*"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

There. Don't you feel better already? Don't try to divine the future. Don't even give a worry to the future. Just be ready. Live your life every day as if Jesus is on His way.

It's time people saw us living like we believe that, anyway.

## GUEST OPINION:



### Homosexuality, church, and truth

By Mike Goeke  
Midland, Texas

"We stand on truth," and the church that continues to assert itself culturally and politically against the "gay agenda" will, ultimately, find itself unprepared for the world in which it exists. While the number of men and women who actually experience same-sex attraction may be relatively small, the number of people impacted by same-sex attraction (either personally or in someone they know) is quite large.

Many churches see the cultural acceptance and theological movement of homosexuality and believe that the answer is to adapt to culture and ride the tide of popular opinion to a place of apathy or acceptance of trendy beliefs and values. Others read a column like this one and bow up defensively, ready to batten down the hatches to keep culture away or, equally wrong, to arm the garrisons and prepare for a

holy war against culture.

Neither of these responses reflects the heart of Christ for the world. For the evangelical church, the answer to the cultural and theological reality surrounding homosexuality is not to build up our defenses against an issue, but instead to bolster our resolve to reach souls.

The gay community, those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction, the parents of gay or struggling kids, the siblings of gay or struggling people, and the friends and co-workers of gay or struggling people all represent souls at risk. These are people in need of the whole of the Gospel — the whole truth of God, His plan for our lives, His perfect ways and the life-transforming power of the cross of Christ.

We must educate ourselves. We must listen to stories and to the real-life experiences of people. We must be ready to

contextualize our message to the subcultures in our own culture like we do in foreign lands. We must understand the ways people think.

"Foreign" mission opportunities, honestly, are just getting closer as our own culture is decidedly post-Christian. Homosexual behavior is one sin among many, and each person impacted by homosexuality is one soul among many. Each of those souls is being lured into something that the church often fails to acknowledge.

The truth on which we stand is constant and foundational, but the culture is fluid. Let's hold firm to truth as we navigate the waters of culture. Let's impact culture with the propositional truth that has the power to bring true meaning, hope, change, and salvation to the experience of life.

Goeke is an associate pastor at Stonegate Fellowship Church in Midland, Texas. He leads Cross Power Ministries, a ministry of Stonegate that ministers to people struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction. Learn more at <http://www.stonegatefellowship.com/www2011/cpm.html>. He can be reached at [mikegoeke@stonegatefellowship.com](mailto:mikegoeke@stonegatefellowship.com). His commentary appears here courtesy of Baptist Press.



# Christian workers pray for end to civil war

Tender cease-fire could mean peace for Myanmar after six decades

MYANMAR (BP) — The government of Myanmar (Burma) and the Karen National Union, the country's oldest ethnic rebel group, signed a cease-fire agreement Jan. 12, bringing a possible end to 60-plus years of fighting between Burmese Buddhist ethnic groups and the predominantly Christian Karen.

Christian workers in Southeast Asia are expressing cautious hope and calling for prayer in light of the historic agreement, the first since the Karen National Union began its struggle for autonomy in 1948. If effective, the cease-fire could mean the end of one of the world's longest-running civil wars.



**FRAGILE TRUCE** — A Karen National Union soldier patrols the trail for potential Burma Army attack while escorting a relief team carrying medical supplies to conflict-ridden areas of Karen State in Myanmar (Burma). Christians are asking prayer in the wake of a Jan. 12 cease-fire agreement between the government and the Karen National Union, the country's oldest ethnic rebel group. "If it lasts, this could be a huge step forward," said a Christian worker based in Southeast Asia. (BP photo)

"If it lasts, this could be a huge step forward," said Mitch Igo (not his real name), a Christian worker based in Southeast Asia. "It could create positive stability."

Hans Peter (not his real name), another Christian worker familiar with the region, agreed. "I hope what we are hearing is true," he said. "The ethnic groups have been down this road before, only to be betrayed."

For many years the Karen people have been the target of "ethnic cleansing" by the ruling Burmese. According to reports from human rights groups, military forces have routinely burned Karen villages, homes, and churches. As a result, thousands of Karen have been forced from

their homes with many seeking refuge in neighboring Thailand.

Given the depth of hatred and bitterness between the two groups, overcoming their longstanding rivalry will take more than a political agreement.

"An entire generation of Burmese and Karen have grown up fighting with each other," Igo said. "There is such deep mistrust it may take another generation to smooth out. Lasting peace will only be found in Christ."

However, Igo and Peter voiced cautious optimism, noting that real change seems to be taking place in the country since the March 2011 elections. Myanmar's first "free" elections in 20 years. The new government has recognized the political party of freed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, sought to improve relations with Western governments and moved to negotiate an end to conflicts with other ethnic rebel groups in addition to the Karen.

In spite of mixed reports on the status of religious freedom since the election, Igo hopes the cease-fire will allow Christian workers access to areas previously closed due to fighting.

Peter hopes these changes are a signal that the cease-fire is "the real deal."

"Time will tell," he said. Among the ways to pray for Myanmar:

- that the cease-fire will result in lasting peace and stability within the region.

"An entire generation of Burmese and Karen have grown up fighting with each other. There is such deep mistrust it may take another generation to smooth out. Lasting peace will only be found in Christ."

— "Mitch Igo"  
Christian worker  
Southeast Asia

- that Burmese and Karen ethnic groups will forgive each other for past atrocities and learn to work together.

- that Christian workers will gain greater access to closed areas as a result of increased openness by the government.

- that Karen Christians will take a lead role in sharing the Gospel with other ethnic groups.

## Looking back

### 10 years ago

W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Church, Dallas, Tex. From 1994 until 1991, dies Jan. 10 in a private residence. He was 92.

### 20 years ago

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's coordinating council votes unanimously in Dallas to call Cecil E. Sherman, pastor of Broadway Church in Fort Worth, Tex., as the first full-time coordinator of the Atlanta-based group formed after the SBC's conservative resurgence.

### 50 years ago

Mississippi College is approved for full membership in the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, according to a joint announcement made by president R.A. McLemore and Dean of the Graduate School Guy C. Mitchell.



MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS

## THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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YOU CAN RESPOND  
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

## Audio Bible available

JACKSON, Tenn. (BP) — Union University in Jackson, Tenn., and LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville have released the Reading God's Story Audio Bible, a recording of the entire Bible by 38 members of the Union faculty and staff. The audio Bible, in the Holman Christian Standard Bible translation, is part of the Read the Bible for Life (RTBFL) biblical literacy initiative. The audio project is based on the RTBFL chronological reading plan developed by George Guthrie, a Bible professor at Union. Guthrie noted that modern-day believers "are increasingly biblically illiterate, and that is due in part to a general illiteracy — many people don't read. Others simply find it hard to take time to read the Bible extensively. To provide people with a well-done, accessible audio option for daily Bible reading is an important ministry," Guthrie said. "We believe the Reading God's Story Audio Bible will be widely used around the world in the years to come." The audio Bible is being offered for free in a variety of listening formats. For more information, visit [blog.georgeguthrie.com/?p=803](http://blog.georgeguthrie.com/?p=803), or get daily audio postings at [www.twitter.com/readinggodstory](http://www.twitter.com/readinggodstory). LifeWay's B&H Publishing Group, publishers of the RTBFL-related Reading God's Story Bible, also have produced an HTML5 reading plan app for the audio files. By visiting the app online at <http://bit.ly/RBLReadingPlanApp>, anyone with a modern browser or mobile device can listen to the audio files and keep track of which ones they have listened to. The app is updated each day with a new reading. A full list of apps associated with the Read the Bible for Life Initiative is available at [ReadTheBibleForLife.com](http://ReadTheBibleForLife.com).

# DETOX YOUR HEART

Recently, I received an email alert with a heading entitled something like detox your business. As you can imagine it was an advertisement sent out by some folks who had put together an approach to help you find where there might be a substance or a situation that would be destructive or harmful. Workplaces, home places, and worship places need to stay alert looking for anything that potentially could hurt people or destroy property. We live in a world that has toxic stuff all around. Sometimes it is in the air and you cannot see it or maybe not even be able to smell it. Other times it is sitting in a corner in a can. Over a period of time it may leak or be so corrosive that it eats through and spreads everywhere. You need to be vigilant and watching for such things.

It is true in our homes. We get so comfortable in our home setting that we do not ever or rarely take time to specifically look for things that could be harmful to our family or friends who may come. We need to get rid of those toxic or potentially dangerous things. Now something that is toxic could be poisonous, or potentially be explosive, or it could be something like a strong acid that could be corrosive and hurtful. Through the years I have known of a number of families who lived in a home that was so infected with a deadly mold that it would make them sick, could potentially kill them, and they had to move out. Even with efforts to eradicate the mold they were not successful in removing it and detoxing it. They literally had to destroy the building. While we may not spend a lot of time looking at these things, they are not frivolous and they do not need to be ignored.

The same thing can be said for our hearts. From time to time, it would be wise for us to take a few minutes and examine it to see if there are toxic waste materials that have just been put in the corner of our hearts and no attention has been given to them. Listen to the Psalmist as he prays. In Psalm 139, he is talking about his own heart condition. In the closing verses he said, "Search me, O God." I would suggest three things to each of us if we are going to detox our hearts.

**The first thing is to notify.** Notify the Lord that you cannot do it by yourself. In fact, you may not even know what you are looking for because sometimes there are those things which infest our lives and become a part of the everyday process and we do not even recognize that they have the potential of doing great harm to us. From time to time you hear of babies or little children who get hold of

something in a household that the adults have just treated as insignificant and commonplace. It could be medicine or it could be some cleaning fluid. Even things that have the potential of doing great good left to the use, abuse, and innocent investigation by a child can be destructive. That is why we need God. We need the wonder of His incredible living Word, the marvel of His presence in us, and His Spirit to turn on a bright searchlight to say, "You need to deal with this."

I am well aware of the fact that others in our world may turn up their noses at dealing with something that is toxic in us. They may dismiss it as old fashioned and old fogey. When God says something is dangerous, we need to stop and check it out. God is able to detect and to clearly express to us the toxic waste in our life. I do not believe that David was seriously consulting the Lord wanting to know what was happening in his own heart when Nathan came and stood before him and shared a parable out of which he would say to the king, "Thou art the man. You are the one who is carrying a sinful contaminate in your life." God graciously

does that for us whether we look to Him and listen to Him or not. We would do well time after time to welcome Him into the home of our heart and allow Him to do some cleaning.

**That leads me to the second word that I would suggest to you and that is to identify.** Clearly identify what is in your heart that should not be there. That is the role of so many of these companies that want to come into a home or a business and identify the dangerous things that are there. As God comes and helps us to see them, they can be named. Sometimes the toxic thing may be unwanted and unwarranted stress. At times they may be identified as strained relationships. How many times do we see this, but we turn our head and do not identify it as something that is affecting all of our life? Maybe it is the strain that has come about between friends, business associates, or family. While we may think that it is not important, it can mess you up in every way and everywhere, so identify.

**The third word that I would give you is to rectify.** Anytime toxic material is discovered it needs to be handled properly, removed completely,

and in every way dealt with professionally. It doesn't matter if it is asbestos, chemicals, or contaminated water it needs to be dealt with and made right. Therein is part of the problem that we have. None of us are experts at removing all of that pollution. But it is at that point in our lives that Jesus becomes so precious. He knows what we need, and He knows how to take care of those things that we need. He can remove our sins and restore the polluted parts of our lives. He is not only an expert, but He is the only ONE who is able to detox the cruel and corrosive things that fill our hearts and our minds. Even now He is waiting to come into your heart and cleanse, renew, restore, and bless you.

The author can be contacted at [jfutral@mbcb.org](mailto:jfutral@mbcb.org).

## BIBLIOPHER

By Charles Marx, 1932 - 2004  
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ZEDQADCFDTZVAZY

AZ DCAF HNXEAWN

ZI'D, DCTD DCN FKA-

HADF THN FOUXNWD

OZDE MEO; UOD HTDC-

NH HNXEAWN

UNWTOFN MEOH

ZTGNF THN QHADDNZ

AZ CNTLNZ.

SOBN DNZ: DQNZDM

CLUE: O=U

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Daniel Six: Twenty-two



Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer  
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# National groups issue controversial stance on sex ed

WASHINGTON (BP) — Four leading education organizations have released national sex education standards that encourage fifth-graders to be taught about sexual orientation, and eighth-graders to learn about gender identity and the morning-after pill.

Many say the recommendations infringe on parental rights.

The non-binding standards by the National Education Association (NEA) and three other groups are billed as the "first-ever national standards" for sex ed in schools, and they provide detailed suggestions for what students should learn by the second, fifth, eighth and 12th grades. From a social conservative's standpoint, nearly every page of the recommendations has something controversial.

By the second grade, students are to learn the "proper names for body parts, including male and female anatomy." By the fifth grade, they should learn that sexual orientation is the "romantic attraction of an individual to someone of the same gender or a different gender."

By the end of the eighth grade, students should be able to "differentiate between gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation" and learn about the morning-after pill, which can cause abortions.

They also should know how to use a condom, the standards say. Gender identity is a term that refers to men and women who, in essence, believe they were born the wrong sex. Both gender identity and gender expression encompass cross-dressers and transgendered individuals.

Although the recommendations are non-binding, the NEA and the other groups hope they catch on with schools. Others, though, are hoping schools simply ignore them.

"In a society where adults are sharply divided on how to address these issues, it makes no sense whatsoever for groups like the NEA to tell our children how they should think," said Bob Stith, the Southern Baptist national strategist for gender issues and representative of the convention's Task Force on Ministry to Homosexuals.

"If children are taught values that are in direct opposition to the biblical values of their parents, those parents would be put in an adversarial position with their own children. This is just simply not a healthy approach."

— Bob Stith, Southern Baptist national strategist for gender issues

Stith added in his comments to Baptist Press. "The reality is that it has the potential to create serious conflicts between parents and children. If children are taught values that are in direct opposition to the biblical values of their parents, those parents would be put in an adversarial position with their own children. This is just simply not a healthy approach."

Among other recommendations, the standards say by the fifth grade, children should be able to:

- "Identify medically accurate information about female and male reproductive anatomy.
- Define HIV and identify some age appropriate methods of transmission, as well as ways to prevent transmission.
- Define sexual harassment and sexual abuse."

By the eighth grade, the standards say students should be able to:

- "Analyze external influences that have an impact on one's attitudes about gender, sexual orientation and gender identity.
  - Access accurate information about gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.
  - Communicate respectfully with and about people of all gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations.
  - Describe the steps to using a condom correctly."
- The standards say that by the 12th grade, students should be able to:
- Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of abstinence and other contra-

ceptive methods, including condoms.

- Differentiate between biological sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression.

- Distinguish between sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual identity."

Valerie Huber of the National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA) described the standards as full of special-interest agendas.

"When we set standards, we should communicate the ideal, the best message to achieve optimal health," Huber said. "When a set of guidelines fails to provide any meaningful emphasis on optimal health but instead gives priority to 'condom negotiation' skills, we have not set standards; we have lowered them and put our children at increased risk."

The other organizations involved in writing the standards were the American Association of Health Education, the American School Health Association, and the Society of State Leaders of Health and Physical Education.

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## Evangelicals undecided on Republican nominee

Poll shows group not  
leaning collectively  
toward any front runner

WASHINGTON (BP) — Evangelicals who vote Republican are divided over whether to support Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, or Newt Gingrich for the GOP nomination, according to a new poll.

The Jan. 4-8 nationwide survey by the Pew Research Center shows Romney and

Santorum with the support of 22% each and Gingrich with 18% among white evangelicals. Rick Perry gets 10% of the evangelical vote and Ron Paul four percent. All of the phone calls were conducted after the Jan. 3 Iowa caucuses and before the New Hampshire primary.

Romney actually has a significant lead among white Catholics, who favor him at 33%, followed by Gingrich (19%) and Santorum (17%). Romney also has a lead among all Republicans with 27% to 16% for Santorum and Gingrich and Paul at 12%. Perry stands at six percent.

Some Republican voters and leaders have

expressed frustration with the GOP field, and the poll reflects that sentiment. Fifty-one percent of GOP voters rate the choices as "excellent/good" compared to 44% who rate it "fair/poor." At this point in 2008, when John McCain, Mike Huckabee, and Romney were leading the pack, 68% of GOP voters rated the field as excellent or good.

Pew said the tepid support for the field compares to Democrats in January 2004, when 47% of Democrats rated their field excellent/good. John Kerry eventually got the Democratic nomination.

The poll was based on landline and cell phone calls with 1,000 adults.



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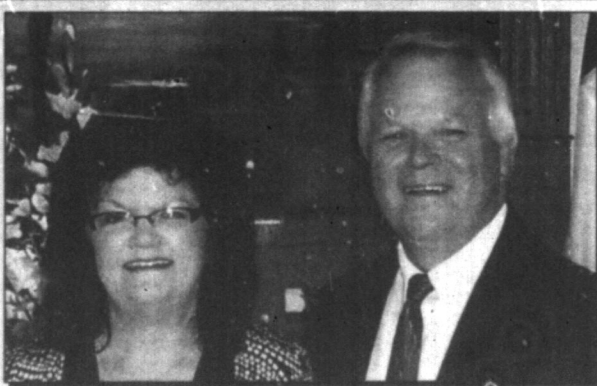
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### STAFF CHANGES

1. Ramah Church, McCall Creek, has called Lonnie Case as pastor. He comes with his wife, Charlene.
2. Billy J. Howse has recently retired from the full-time pastorate and is available for supply, revivals, and homecomings. He is available for Lincoln and surrounding counties. He may be contacted at (601) 734-6700 or 2780 Gateway Ln. SE, Bogue, Chitto, MS 39629.



2. Doris and Billy Howse

## COLLEGE NEWS



1. WCU leadership course participants



2. Hampson

1. **William Carey University** gave area high school students a unique opportunity to obtain leadership skills through a hands-on, college-credit course during J-Term. Taught by Hattiesburg residents Lt. Col. Fred Varnado and his wife, Col. Sheila Varnado, 20 high school juniors and seniors from Hattiesburg High School and Presbyterian Christian High School met January 2-6 to expand their goal-setting and team building skills and meet with area community leaders. The students visited the African-American Military History Museum in downtown Hattiesburg, met with Mayor Johnny Dupree and participated in group problem solving projects. Shown are the participants.
2. One of the world's finest baritones, **Thomas Hampson** performs his *Song of America* concert at **Mississippi College** on Jan. 24, at 7:30 p.m. Ticket prices are set at \$40 per person and \$20 for students with an ID card. Students from all schools — from elementary schools to universities — are welcome to attend. The **Thomas Hampson** concert is part of the \$100 package for those subscribing to the **James Sclater Chamber Music Series**. For more information regarding tickets, call the Music Department's **Dottie Serio** at 601-925-3440.
3. Former Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** will be the keynote speaker for **Mississippi College's** spring scholarship banquet Apr. 17. Rice will be making her second speaking engagement at **Mississippi College**; she served as keynote speaker during MC Law graduation ceremonies in 2003. As speaker at the spring scholarship banquet, Rice will join an all-star roster of prominent guests, including former U.S. Senate Majority Leader **Bob Dole**, magazine publisher **Steve Forbes**, and former Arkansas Governor **Mike Huckabee**. The annual event has raised more than \$1 million for scholarships at MC.
4. **Mississippi College** offers several sponsorship opportunities that help support **Mississippi College**. Sponsorships begin at \$1,500. Individual tickets to the scholarship banquet are \$200. For more information, please contact **Amy Rowan** at (601) 925.3257 or [rowan@mc.edu](mailto:rowan@mc.edu).
5. **Blue Mountain College** will launch a new major in **Worship Leadership**, a bachelor of arts degree. The new course of study will replace the major in **Church Music**, and will combine 44 hours of musical studies with 18 hours of Biblical studies and Christian ministries, and 14 hours of **Worship Leadership** — in addition to the core course requirements. For complete information, contact **Greg Long** at [glong@bmc.edu](mailto:glong@bmc.edu) or at (662) 685-4771 extension 148.
6. **Richard Thomas Michael Balkcom** received his Doctor of Ministry degree from the **New Orleans Baptist Seminary** in December of 2011. **Balkcom** is pastor of **Southway Baptist Church** in Brookhaven.

# COURAGEOUS

HONOR BEGINS AT HOME



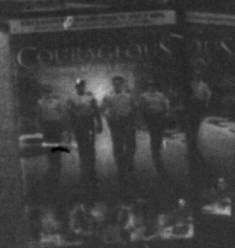
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## JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Gracewood Church, Southaven

1. **Gracewood Church, Southaven**, held a GA recognition. Representing GAs are Ashlynn Carter, Layna Carter, and Whitney Moss. GA leaders are Ann Westgard and Anna Cook.

2. **First Church, Kosciusko**, recognized pastor Barry C. Corbett Nov. 13 for having the longest tenure as pastor in the 163 year history of the church. A plaque was presented to Corbett by Anne H. Porter, church historian. Robert Autry, personnel chairman, expressed appreciation to the Corbetts on behalf of the church.

3. **First Church, Terry**, is hosting the Mayberry Dinner Theater Feb. 17 and 18. Tickets, \$15, which includes the cost of the presentation and a steak or chicken dinner. Call (601) 878-5735 or email rita@fbcterry.org.

4. **Harperville Church, Harperville**, held a groundbreaking Jan. 8 on a construction/renovation project which includes increasing seating in the worship center, renovation of Sunday School rooms, nursery and toddler areas, and other improvements. Shown are committee members Ruth Gaddis, Mollie Dolan, Larry Brantley, Jason Tillman, pastor Bobby McKay, Peggy McDaniel, and David Benton.

5. Pastor John R. Sapp, with helpers Missy & Prissy Frantom and Aryssa & Olivia Fountain of **First Church, Lumberton**, are shown getting ready to sort and distribute Angel Tree gifts to needy local families by Christmas Eve.

6. The GA girls, leaders, and mothers of **Calvary Church, Bogue Chitto**, went Christmas caroling during the holidays. Leaders are Shirley Allen, Karen Fahner, and Pam Wallace. Hal Hatten, pastor. Shown are the participants.

7. **First Church, Vicksburg**, ordained Ryan Lee and Chris Goodin as deacons Jan. 8. Shown are Lee, pastor Matt Buckles, and Goodin.



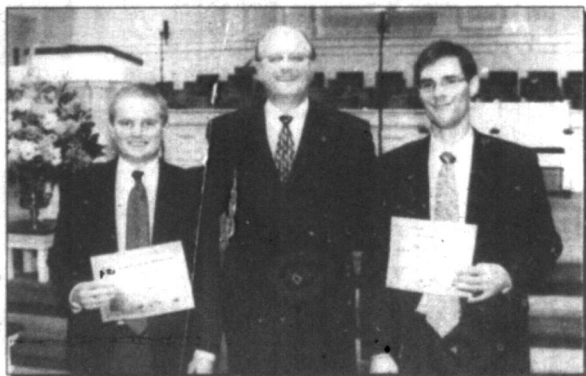
4. Harperville Church groundbreaking



5. First Church, Lumberton



6. Calvary Church, Bogue Chitto



7. First Church, Vicksburg

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*Record*



FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (BP) — Tim Tebow's riveting and tumultuous season ended Jan. 14, with the New England Patriots hammering the Denver Broncos 45-10 in an AFC divisional playoff game.

## Broncos' season ends, but QB's witness doesn't falter

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (BP) — Tim Tebow's riveting and tumultuous season ended Jan. 14, with the New England Patriots hammering the Denver Broncos 45-10 in an AFC divisional playoff game.

"A lot of ups and downs," Tebow said about his second NFL season after the loss in Foxborough, Mass. "Overall, it's been a very special opportunity for me, something I'm really thankful for. There's a lot of things we're proud of. Obviously, it's hard to see them all right now."

Still, Tebow's performance over the course of the season earned him the right to be the starting quarterback entering the 2012 season, Denver vice president of football operations John Elway said on Jan. 16.

The popular quarterback, whose habit of kneeling in prayer on the football field started a nationwide trend of copycats engaging in "Tebowing," inspired millions of fans with his positive attitude, charitable work with the seriously ill, and overt references to his faith in Jesus Christ.

He also earned the derision and mockery of others who didn't share his religious beliefs.

Tebow's penchant for pulling out seemingly impossible wins also sparked a lively debate about the role God plays in a player's success.

"It may be that Tebow will succeed in spectacular fashion; it may be that he will have the worst game of his life," Owen Strachan, professor of theology and church history at Boyce College, wrote in an article in *The Atlantic* before the game with the Patriots. "Either way, the Bible assures us that God loves his chosen, God is orchestrating every detail of their lives, and God will lead them through success or failure to the end of all things."

Boyce College is the undergraduate school at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Tebow's status with the Broncos was a touchy subject even from the start of the team's training camp. Several football analysts were pessimistic about his prospects as a successful NFL quarterback, and at one time speculation loomed that Tebow might fall to third-string behind Brady Quinn.

Things changed, however, when Denver went only 1-4 under then-quarterback Kyle Orton. The Broncos handed the starting job to Tebow, who led the team to a 7-1 record over the next eight games, including several thrilling come-from-behind victories in the final seconds.

Though Tebow struggled late in the season and the Broncos lost their final three games, they squeaked into the playoffs when Oakland lost its final game to San Diego, giving Denver the division title with an 8-8 record.

In Denver's opening-round playoff game against Pittsburgh Jan. 8, Tebow had his best game in the NFL — throwing for 316 yards, including an 80-yard touchdown pass on the first play of overtime to give the Broncos a shocking win.

Tebow couldn't duplicate that success against the Patriots. New England quarterback Tom Brady threw six touchdown passes, and Tebow completed only nine of 26 passing attempts for 136 yards.

"I just wanted to show character, and anytime you get beat like that, you continue to fight," Tebow said after the game. "It doesn't change who you are, how you play, how you go out there. You should be the same at all times, and that's what I wanted to show."

Throughout the season Tebow was the subject of mockery and scorn by some, such as Detroit Lions linebacker Stephen Tulloch, who kneeled in a mocking prayerful pose after sacking Tebow in an Oct. 30 game. Others, including Baltimore Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs, were more vocal in their criticism. "We don't need God on our sidelines," Suggs said in reference to Tebow.

Despite the criticism, by the end of the season Tebow was earning the fanfare of writers and fans alike. ESPN columnist Rick Reilly, in an article titled, *I Believe in Tim Tebow*, reported on Tebow's actions toward those who have serious illnesses.

"Every week, Tebow picks out someone who is suffering, or who is dying, or who is injured," Reilly wrote. "He flies these people and their families to the Broncos game, rents them a car, puts them up in a nice hotel, buys them dinner (usually at a Dave & Buster's), gets them and their families pregame passes, visits with them just before kickoff (!), gets them 30-yard-line tickets down low, visits with them after the game (sometimes for an hour), has them walk him to his car, and sends them off with a basket of gifts."

Reilly said such actions, regardless of Tebow's performance on the field, are praiseworthy.

"I've given up giving up on him," Reilly wrote. "I'm a 100% believer. Not in his arm. Not in his skills. I believe in his heart, his there-will-definitely-be-a-porphy-under-the-tree optimism, the way his love pours into people, right up to their eyeballs, until they believe they can master the hopeless comeback, too."

## More arrested as protests continue over church-public school ban in NYC

NEW YORK (BP) — Police arrested 43 New York City pastors and lay people on Jan. 12 who were protesting the city's ban on church use of public schools for worship services that will go into effect Feb. 12.

The week before, police arrested New York City Councilman and pastor Fernando Cabrera, pastor Bill Devlin, and five others on charges of criminal trespassing. Their alleged trespass was kneeling and singing two hymns outside the doors of the New York City Department of Education. Police held them in custody for three hours.

The latest arrests came after more than 200 people gathered in the rain outside a Bronx public school where New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg was giving his state of the city address.

After singing songs and cheering speeches, protesters walked out in orderly groups of five to eight to kneel in front of barricades and pray.

Police warned them to leave and then made arrests on charges of disorderly conduct.

The New York City Board of Education has banned religious use of schools on Sunday mornings or at other times the schools are otherwise unused — even though the churches rent the space, dropping an estimated several million dollars per year into the city cashbox.

If the ban prevails, more than 150 congregations will have to move to other meeting space starting next month, and that's hard to find in New York City.

The following day, the New York City Housing Authorities reversed its position to evict churches that meet inside community centers. Board of Education officials stuck with their ban on churches, though, saying it will protect the minds of "impressionable youth."

On Jan. 9 more than 100 persons from different ethnic, income, and denominational backgrounds held a prayer meeting at Calvary Baptist Church in midtown Manhattan. The prayer event concluded a citywide week of fasting and prayer on behalf of pastors and council members who are working to overturn the ban.

Bronx pastor Dimas Salberrios said the ban would be particularly harmful in poorer communities. Churches in boroughs like Queens and the Bronx successfully battle crime and poverty, and uprooting them is "destructive," he said, pointing to lower crime rates, help for the poor and homeless, and educational assistance for children as examples of what churches contribute.

The Bronx pastor, who has battled homicides in his own neighborhood and been held at gunpoint six times, has been on a hunger strike since Jan. 1 and says he won't eat until the ban is overturned.

Attempts at a legislative fix are underway. New York Assemblyman Nelson Castro has introduced Bill A08800, which would allow "the use of school buildings and school sites for religious meetings and worship when not in use for school purposes or when such service or worship is deemed not disruptive of normal school operations."

More than 150 congregations in New York City will be forced to find new meeting places when the new law goes into effect on February 12.



# New symbol for 'throwing' Christian love surfaces

MOBILE, Ala. (BP) — It's a simple idea, associating a three-finger hand gesture with the Trinity. Mark Mitchum, creator of "three-throwing," believes it can be a clearly defined, unmistakable hand gesture for Christians when verbal fellowship can't occur.

"I came up with the idea while driving around," said Mitchum, a registered nurse in a cardiac cath lab in Panama City, Fla., and member of First Church there. "I would see lots of Christian symbols like the cross, fish, dove, or even a clever bumper sticker or two, and would think, 'Hey that's cool. They're Christians, but what do they know about me?'"

"I figured a simple Christian hand gesture could connect us for a few seconds and allow fellowship and encouragement."

In researching Christian gestures, however, Mitchum said he found nothing in mainstream pop culture seen as Christian.

Until now, Mitchum is on a mission to spread the three-finger Trinity sign to the Christian community. "Mark has given the body of Christ a simple yet meaningful symbol for encouraging one another as we are walking in the world," said Craig Conner, pastor of First Church in Panama City.

"A simple 'three-throw' reminds us who we are and challenges us to fight the good fight of faith."

Mitchum hopes to see three-throwing used to promote fellowship and community among followers of Christ whether in "traffic, ballgames, concerts, photos, or anywhere else the Word can't be heard."



**THREETHROWING** — Mark Mitchum "threethrows" at a busy street corner in Panama City, Fla. The registered nurse and his supporters are out to "revolutionize" the nation with the non-verbal indication of faith. (BP photo)

In order to raise awareness of the Trinity symbol, Mitchum created a YouTube video, titled, "Three Throw the Trinity Christian hand sign," which shows it being used at a busy intersection. Mark was also interviewed about three-throwing on K-LOVE national Christian radio last year.

In addition, Mitchum has given his three-finger Trinity artwork to the Panama City Rescue

Mission to help raise funding for their multiple ministries.

"We are inspired by Mark's generosity," said Amanda Harris Bawn, the rescue mission's director of development and public relations. "The Trinity sticker has the power to be a worldwide movement and we are honored to be part of it. We are especially thankful for the awareness Mark brings to issues of hunger, homeless,

poverty and abuse here locally.

"Mark is a great example of believers standing up for what Jesus called us to do, and the Trinity sign is just one of his many blessings offered to the Panama City Rescue Mission."

Mitchum, a 1995 graduate of the Baptist-affiliated University of Mobile, hopes the Trinity symbol also can spark the curiosity of nonbelievers, providing a convenient icebreaker

for them to ask questions and begin dialogue.

"I think this expression of our faith has the potential to sweep across the nation and world," said Bruce Raley, national education ministry leader with Lifeway Christian Resources in Nashville and former teaching pastor at First Church in Panama City.

"This simple sign is a means to let others know of our faith and life in Jesus Christ. There is encouragement in knowing that others in our community are Christians and not ashamed to proclaim so."

Matthew 18:20 serves as a cornerstone for Mitchum's three-throwing initiative: "For where two or three are gathered together, I am there in the midst of them." Mitchum encourages believers to lift up Christ and promote a sense of Christian unity where it's never been evident before.

More than just holding up three fingers, the Trinity gesture can be a way of glorifying the name of Jesus in a creative, unconventional way, Mitchum said.

"There is just something different, eternity-centered and all-completing about helping initiate and establish a way for the King of the universe to be exalted in more places and by more people than before," he said.

"What we as Christians did for the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, will be the only true criteria for any effort worth remembering and celebrating."

*Editor's note: For more information about the Trinity three-throwing symbol, including the K-LOVE interview with Mark Mitchum, go to [www.threethrow.com](http://www.threethrow.com).*

## Court rules unanimously on Christian school employment case

WASHINGTON (BP) — In a landmark decision for churches, the U.S. Supreme Court has for the first time ruled that a "ministerial exception" allows congregations and religious groups to hire and fire ministers free of federal employment discrimination laws.

The unanimous ruling on Jan. 11 in a case closely watched by religious liberty organizations involved a teacher who had been fired from an Evangelical Lutheran Church school in Michigan. The teacher, the equivalent of a minister in the school's employee classification, sued the school after she was fired, and the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in her favor.

Although the case only involved one employee at a Christian school, the constitutional principle in the case could have impacted churches. Observers considered it one of the most significant religious freedom cases to reach the high court in decades.

The Sixth Circuit's decision worried religious groups who feared that a ruling against them would strike a blow to their hiring freedoms. The Southern Baptist

Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and International Mission Board signed a brief urging the high court to side with the Lutheran school.

The Supreme Court, with no dissenters, said that the First Amendment is clear in preventing government interference. "The Establishment Clause prevents the Government from appointing ministers, and the Free Exercise Clause prevents it from interfering with the freedom of religious groups to select their own," Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the court.

The two clauses are found in the section of the First Amendment pertaining to religious liberty: "The Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Although lower courts had sided with the ministerial exception, the Supreme Court had never ruled on the matter.

"We agree that there is such a ministerial exception," Roberts wrote. "... Requiring a church to accept or retain an unwanted minister, or punishing a church for failing to do so, intrudes upon more

than a mere employment decision. Such action interferes with the internal governance of the church, depriving the church of control over the selection of those who will personify its beliefs. By imposing an unwanted minister, the state infringes the Free Exercise Clause, which protects a religious group's right to shape its own faith and mission through its appointments.

Roberts added: "According to the state the power to determine which individuals will minister to the faithful also violates the Establishment Clause, which prohibits government involvement in such ecclesiastical decisions."

In his 22-page decision, Roberts set forth historical background, noting that the Puritans fled to New England in order to "escape the control of the national church." After the First Amendment was adopted in the late 1700s, Roberts said, the federal government made clear its understanding of the amendment's meaning. For example, when the first Catholic bishop in the U.S. asked President Jefferson in 1806 who should be appointed to direct the affairs of the Catholic Church in the

Louisiana Territory, Secretary of State James Madison responded that it was an "entirely ecclesiastical matter" for the church to decide. Roberts also quoted an 1872 Supreme Court opinion in which the justices refused to decide whether slavery or anti-slavery factions controlled Walnut Street Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Ky.

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty represented the Lutheran school. "The message of today's opinion is clear: The government can't tell a church who should be teaching its religious message," said Luke Goodrich, deputy national litigation director at the Becket Fund. "This is a huge victory for religious freedom and a rebuke to the government, which was trying to regulate how churches select their ministers."

The Department of Justice had urged the high court to reject totally the "ministerial exception."

The Alliance Defense Fund, which also has been involved in the case, also applauded the ruling.

# Church security: Lack of plan can lead to tragedy

By Chester L. Quarles  
Correspondent

Sixth in a seven-part,  
aperiodical series

You've just encountered an armed intruder in your church. What do you do? How do you respond to a nightmare?

You need a well thought-out plan, because most people lose their ability to think logically during an ongoing crisis. They lose their cognitive processing and make bad decisions. Being prepared can save your life and the lives of those in your congregation. Having a plan gives you an edge!

Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all plan for an armed predator in any church. The mega-church has many more options than does a small congregation. A single shooter can't control a crowd of 3,000-10,000 worshippers. Worshipers some distance from the spree shooter can evacuate through alternative exits. However, in a small church, congregational setting the spree shooter can control all of the exits.

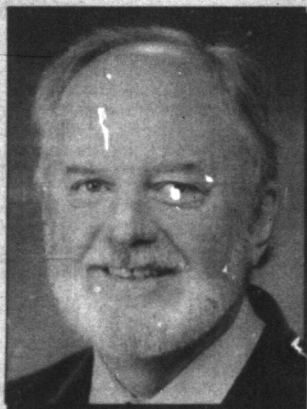
Most shooting trajectories (the path of the bullet) are higher than 18 inches. Positioning yourself lower than this significantly decreases your chances of being shot. If everyone hits the floor, it will also provide a clear shot for any gun-carrying guardian or police officer working with you.

The officer or guardian can't fire if innocent people are in the way. He or she is totally helpless, even with a firearm, the skill to use it well, and the will to use it to save lives in a chaotic situation, where innocents impede a clear shot.

The time to stop the spree shooter is before he enters the sanctuary. This is accomplished by a layered security program which should begin at your parking area. This is where your guardians can intervene. The best weapon available in a church shooting event is not a firearm — it's a cell phone and the requirement to dial it immediately upon perceiving a threat.

If a gun call is answered by law enforcement authorities, whether it be a robbery, shooting event, or a group hostage taking, you should be prepared to respond appropriately. Should the police enter your church during an ongoing gun emergency, you should duck and take cover. If it is possible, get on the floor and avoid the bullets that may start flying.

For elderly people, the best idea is to lean forward in the pew



Quarles

and place your hands behind your head. This shows your adversaries and the police as well that you are not a threat.

In a group hostage taking, all precipitous behavior should be avoided. If there is only one adversary, you may be able to stop him. If there are several, the situation is even more tenuous. Starting a firefight, even with a clear shot at one or more assailants, is fraught with danger for all in attendance.

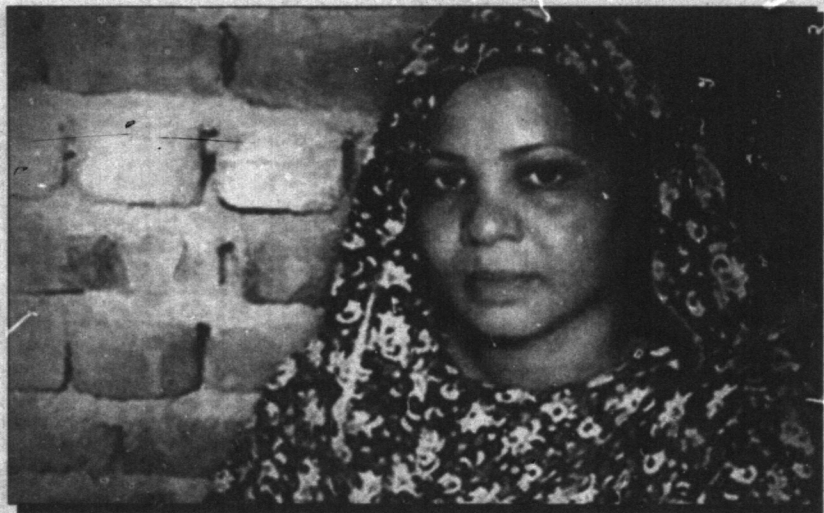
Psychologists call active resistance in such a situation "counter-phobic behavior," and it should be avoided at all costs.

Do what the hostage takers tell you to do. Never say "no" and never say "never" to armed men in a public setting. These words can get you killed. Robbers and hostage takers want control and they want it now! By acquiescing, you can become a "successful victim." Successful victims survive and usually don't require hospitalization.

If anyone loses control, some of your people will likely be killed. With this in mind, church leaders should plan for the possibility of an active shooter or a group hostage taking event, and insure that all ushers, deacons, and members of your "Nehemiah's Team/Shepherd's Watch" are all operating from the same plan.

If shooting assaults are already taking place, men need to stop the shooter. Unfortunately, the best time to stop him is when he reloads.

Quarles is professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and co-author of the book, *Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship*. He may be contacted at [cquarles@olemiss.edu](mailto:cquarles@olemiss.edu). Copyright 2011. Used by permission.



Asia Bibi

## Pakistani Christian remains in jail as conflicts swirl around her

LAHORE, Pakistan (BP) — As a Christian mother of five sits on death row in Pakistan accused of insulting Islam's prophet Muhammad, new controversies are brewing over her case.

Asia Bibi (referred to in some reports as Asia Noreen) was jailed in 2009 after a dispute with local Muslim women who later accused her of insulting Muhammad, an offense punishable by death under Pakistani law.

Although she denied any wrongdoing, she was convicted a year later and sentenced to death. While Bibi waits for her appeal to be heard in court, a non-governmental organization (NGO) claiming to represent her is trading accusations with her husband Ashiq.

The Masihi Foundation, which describes itself as a humanitarian organization and claims to be Bibi's legal counsel, published what it said was an interview with Bibi from her Pakistani prison, where it claimed to have found her mistreated, in poor health, and near mental illness.

The Express Tribune in Pakistan, an affiliate of the International Herald Tribune, reported that Shahid Khan, home secretary of the Punjab region where Bibi is imprisoned, gave no permission for such a visit, and officials at the jail where Bibi is being held denied the visit ever happened.

Furthermore, Bibi's husband Ashiq told The Express Tribune that he saw Asia over Christmas and didn't notice any health problems.

"I asked Asia and she says no one met her," he said. "The Masihi Foundation is trying to earn money out of my wife's name."

The husband also told The Express Tribune that Masihi Foundation is no longer Bibi's legal representation. "We do not think it is advisable to pursue Asia's case right now under the current government," he said. "We are in touch with some top lawyers in the country."

The Masihi Foundation countered by claiming it still represents Bibi and accusing her husband, who signed a contract with a publisher for a book on Asia, of looking to enrich himself.

"Ashiq is only interested in money-making, which he has been involved in ever since international support started coming in for Asia," Haroon Barkat, the head of MF, told The Express Tribune.

Amid the squabbling, Bibi is still locked in

her cell for all but 30 minutes a day, according to The Telegraph in London, basing its report on an interview Bibi gave to Life for All, a Christian organization.

"I am given raw material to cook for myself, since the administration fears I might be poisoned, as other Christians accused of blasphemy were poisoned or killed in the jail," she said, adding that a female warden was suspended for trying to strangle her.

As Bibi awaits the ruling on her appeal, her case — and Pakistan's blasphemy laws — have unleashed deadly tensions in Pakistan.

Salman Taseer, governor of Pakistan's Punjab province, was a vocal critic of blasphemy laws and called for Bibi to be pardoned. He was gunned down in January 2011 by an Islamist member of his security squad who, according to media reports, was angry with the governor's stance.

"Witnesses said [the guard] fired 20 rounds into Salman Taseer's back, while members of the security team that was supposed to guard the Punjab governor stood watching," wrote Terry Mattingly, religion columnist for the Scripps Howard news service.

Moderate Muslim leaders, fearing for their lives, refused to condemn the shooting and many of the troubled nation's secular political leaders — including President Asif Ali Zardari, a friend and ally of Taseer — declined to attend the funeral," wrote Mattingly, who also is director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

Two months later, Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's minister for minorities and the only Christian in the government, was killed by unidentified gunmen after campaigning for reform of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

While the office of Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari said he would pardon Bibi if an appeals court upholds her death sentence, a pardon would not guarantee her safety. In July 2010, two Christian brothers accused of blasphemy were gunned down inside a courthouse during their trial and the imam of Bibi's village mosque suggested a similar fate awaits her.

"If the law punishes someone for blasphemy, and that person is pardoned, then we will also take the law in our hands," Qari Mohammed Salim told the British Broadcasting Corporation.



## BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

### Loving in a Divided Culture

Acts 10

By Burn Page

I grew up in Georgia and, being a "son of the South," I lived a prejudiced life without knowing I was doing it. I just thought that was how things were. Prejudicial thinking did not begin in the southern states, however; it's been present since society began. [When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom (Israel), their customary practice was to deport the upper class to other territories of the empire (2 Kings 17:6), while importing people from other conquered lands and settling them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel (2 Kings 17:24).] Those people who were imported eventually married those who had been left in Israel, and out of those inter-racial marriages, the Samaritans (a mixed race) arose. They were despised after

the Exile by the pure-blooded Jews who returned to Jerusalem (cf. Ezra-Nehemiah), and they were still despised in Jesus' day 700 years later.

In our lesson for this week, Peter came face to face with his prejudice against Gentiles. Prejudice still abounds today between people of different races and religious backgrounds. The word prejudice means to pre-judge. When I see someone of a different skin color or someone who dresses differently from me (wearing a turban for instance), I tend to pre-judge them. Therefore, I assume everyone who looks like that person or dresses like that person is the same as that person, and I am the poorer because I never get to know the person. I have pre-judged them and conveniently placed them



Page

in a "box" where they are "all the same."

In Acts 10, it's interesting that one called Simon (Peter) is staying with one called Simon (a tanner). People who worked with animal skins were considered "unclean" by Jewish society. While Peter had overcome this stereotype,

he had not overcome his prejudice toward Gentiles. During his prayer time one day, Peter had a vision. It was a vision of a large sheet being lowered from heaven with all kinds of animals, reptiles, and fowl (at least some of which were deemed "unclean"), and Peter was commanded to "kill and eat." For the third time (v. 14) in Peter's career, he refused a direct command of the Lord (cf. Matt. 16:23; John 13:8). God rebutted, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (v. 15).

This command had a direct implication to Peter's mission. An angel of God had appeared to Cornelius (a Gentile) and

told him to send men to Joppa and bring back "one Simon who is called Peter." Cornelius obediently sent two of his servants and a devout soldier to bring Peter to his house. About the time the men arrived at Simon's house, the Spirit said to Peter, "get up and go . . . with them" (v.20). The next day Peter "got up and set out with them." As God had sent his angel to Cornelius and as Cornelius had sent his servant to Peter, now the Spirit was sending Peter to Cornelius. Peter was being an obedient servant.

Each one of us has to choose between being "willing to serve" and being "a servant." When we are "willing to serve," we are still in control. We determine when, where, how much, and whom we will serve. But when we choose to "be a servant," we place our lives under the authority of our master and serve at his discretion—whenever, wherever, however, and whomever. As the Lord's servants, we are charged (commissioned) to tell others the "good news of peace

through Jesus Christ" (v. 36). We will never feel our way into acting; we must act our way into feeling. If I wait until I feel like exercising, I never will do it. But when I act (exercise), then I feel good. When we have the opportunity to "love others in a divided culture," let's act on the authority of our Lord and not wait until we feel like loving. If we wait on our feelings, we will never act on his command.

Peter finally repented of his prejudices toward Gentiles. He came to understand that "God doesn't show favoritism" (34). To repent literally means "to change the way one thinks." When we change the way we think, we will change the way we act. If we can get our children to think differently about something, they will act differently. God wants his children to repent of old prejudices based on hate, and act toward others based on love.

*Page is chair of the Department of Christian Studies and Philosophy at Mississippi College and a member of First Church, Clinton.*

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### Be Exclusive

Deuteronomy 4:5-10, 15-19, 39-40

By Melleen Moore

My grandchildren love to play the game, Monopoly, and are quite good at it. It is a test of patience for me as the game seems to go on forever. It was somewhat surprising to find the word 'monopoly' in the dictionary's definition of exclusive (the lesson title). After pondering the two words — exclusive and monopoly, the surprise gave way to meaning. Exclusive suggest one way or one of a kind. Realizing that is the goal of the game, the definition made sense. God's desire is to monopolize our hearts so there is no need for another.

Learn and Live

By God's Ways

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

God and His teachings are always available. The term twenty-four seven has become popu-

lar in today's society. God is just that accessible today as He was to the Israelites. They did not have to wonder aimlessly upon leaving Egypt as God provided leaders — Moses and Aaron, and physical needs — food, water, and protection from danger. Meeting their spiritual needs was of utmost importance. God established the nation with laws needed to honor Him and laws needed to live united as a nation. The Children of Israel nearly forty years later find themselves in the plains of Moab on the brink of entering the promise land. God calls His people "Now, O Israel, listen" (Deuteronomy 4:1, KJV). Listen carries the idea to hear and obey — speaking of the permanent statutes — laws, and judgments — decisions, that God had given the Israelites. The laws were complete and sufficient and



Moore

the Children of Israel had seen God's action during their wilderness journey. Moses reminded them of the experience at Baal Peor. God had destroyed all those who participated in the harlotry with the Moabite women and those who worshipped Baal — some 24,000.

Those who stayed true to God were alive and well. In preparation for entering the promise land, the Israelites are reminded to act as taught — obeying the statutes and judgments in possessing the land. By being obedient to the righteous laws of God, the people of Canaan would observe their witness as a people of wisdom and understanding (verse 6), as a people with a close relationship to their God (verse 7), and a people of character that God desired to live in the promise land (verse 8).

Center Your Whole

Family on God

Deuteronomy 4:9-10

God instructed the Children of Israel to know and be contin-

uous in keeping His ways. It was not enough for just the adults; it was important for their children and grandchildren to know God's ways. They are cautioned to diligently heed and keep themselves from forgetting God's actions. The actions of God were to be passed down so their children may teach their children. Specifically mentioned was the day God spoke from Mt. Horeb — the mountain was on fire and the earth shook. God's voice was heard but no form was seen.

Let Nothing Else Have

God's Place

Deuteronomy 4:15-19

God is a jealous God and expects His children to worship Him alone. It is offensive to God for any shaped or craved image to be made for worship. The scripture cautions against likeness of male or female, any animal, winged bird, creeping thing, fish, sun, moon, star or host of the heavens. The creator is to be worshipped — Him and Him alone. There are no excuses for worshipping any image. After all that the Children of Israel had

seen God do in their journey through the wilderness, He was worthy to be worshipped.

Recognize God's Leadership

Every Day

Deuteronomy 4:39-40

God wanted the Children of Israel to acknowledge Him from early morning throughout the day keeping their eyes alert and hearts focused on Him. It is the desire of a spirit filled heart to be intimate with God. The Israelites could expect to live well with their children and grandchildren, enjoying prolonged days, in the promise land by keeping "His statutes and His commandments" (Deuteronomy 4:40, NKJV). Taking possession of the promise land would be by grace. It wasn't anything the Children of Israel had done. Without God's provision and intervention the possession would not be possible. We can receive God's greatest blessing by being obedient to Him and dependent on Him — exclusively as our one and only God.

*Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.*

## Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

# THE BAPTIST Record

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either e-mail, CD or DVD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

# Battle for the temple

'Food Revolution' pastor fires new salvo in war against obesity

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. (BP) — The pastor who became nationally known on the ABC TV show, Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution, found a passion for physical stewardship from real-life experiences.

Five years ago, Steve Willis lost a good friend during heart surgery. For years, his friend's doctor had told him to eat healthier and lose weight. However, even the pastor joked about overeating — until his friend died.

About the same time, Willis' youngest son was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder. The youth got in trouble at school, didn't follow directions, and did poorly on assignments. After placing the youth on medication, the cure proved worse than the disease, said Willis, pastor of the Huntington-area First Church in Kenova, W.Va.

One day as they looked at their "zoned out" boy, Willis said he and his wife Deanna decided they had to do something else. Although their son was quiet, he was no longer his true self, Willis said.

As a result, Deanna started reading about natural, God-given solutions and eliminated sugar, soda pop, trans-fats, and hydrogenated oils from their son's diet. "I started realizing that how we choose to eat is a moral issue," said the pastor and author of the new book, *Winning the Food Fight*.

"If people are dying at an early age solely because they are overweight, are spending \$200 a month on medications because they won't change their eating habits, and children are doing poorly in school because parents won't give them proper nutrition, those are moral issues," Willis said.

Willis set his concerns before the church in what the Centers for Disease Control had labeled the "unhealthiest city in America." As a result of First Church's efforts to combat obesity, Willis received a call from a producer at ABC who worked with renowned British chef Jamie Oliver.

Willis agreed to help Oliver tape six episodes of his show in Huntington in 2010, a venture that later earned an Emmy. During post-production, Oliver encouraged Willis to keep telling churches about proper nutrition.

"There were a lot of weight loss books out there but very few that deal with a moral and biblical philosophy of good food and physical exercise," Willis said. "Once we started controlling our eating habits, our spiritual lives started changing as well. I knew that our story had to be told."

Oliver volunteered to write the book's foreword, along with providing a few healthy recipes.

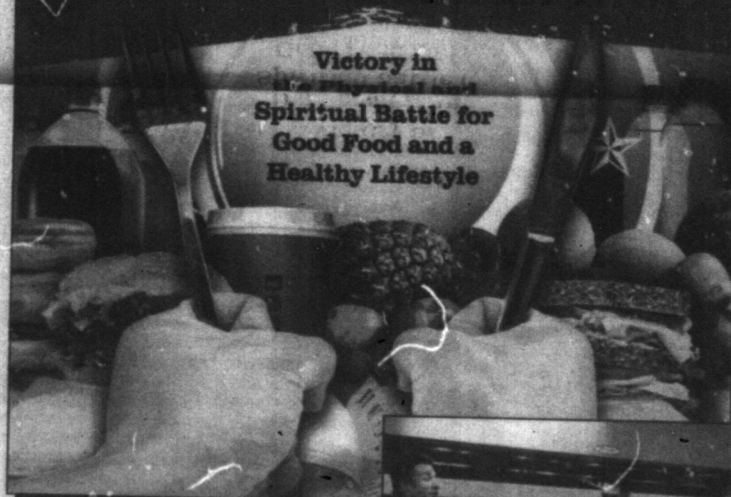
Willis hopes *Winning the Food Fight* will encourage church leaders to teach people that God cares how they treat their bodies. He sees his son as a prime example of how proper nutrition can change the lives of those struggling with physical, mental and spiritual issues.

"Within a few months of improving his diet, he was better behaved, an A student in math, and memorized his

## STEVE WILLIS

Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution

# WINNING THE FOOD FIGHT



**AT RIGHT: CHANGING BAD HABITS** — Steve Willis (center) joins British chef Jamie Oliver (left) and volunteer cooks at First Church in Kenova, W.Va., as part of Oliver's 2010 visit to the Huntington area to film the six-part ABC show, *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution*, that later won an Emmy Award (BP photo)



entire Awana [youth missions] book," Willis said.

"With sugar in his system, he couldn't remember John 3:16. It wasn't a miracle. It was just a conscious decision on our part to give our three children the nutrition God intended them to have."

The issue of nutrition also affected Willis as a child. In his book, the pastor describes growing up in a coal

mining town and often eating fatty government commodities. Despite a few improvements, the situation remains similar today, Willis said.

He pointed to Congress recently voting to qualify frozen pizza as a vegetable serving for school lunches because it contains a couple of tablespoons of high-sodium tomato paste, nudging real vegetables from children's lunch trays.

Willis said the goal of his book is helping pastors who want their congregations to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31), mothers who still value family dinners and churches that want to improve the way they reach out to their communities, "but most of all, it is a wakeup call for every American," Willis said.

"There's a reason our nation is getting more and more obese. It's because our government has helped create a food system that is literally killing us with cheap food. The church has to get involved. Until our people understand how we are being manipulated into poor health, they will not be able to make the changes necessary for a true food revolution."

As a result of local teams that Willis has helped initiate, today Huntington:

- has a distance run nearly every weekend.
- has seen area churches sponsor diet and exercise accountability groups.
- has established a downtown culinary training institute that offers ongoing healthy cooking lessons.

In addition, First Church Kenova hosts healthy, affordable Wednesday night community dinners.

Another step their pastor envisions to combat obesity is Food Fight Boot Camps. If enough people respond, First Church Kenova will offer 60-day residential programs aimed at helping participants conquer food addictions through diet, exercise and spiritual nurture.

Among the efforts initiated to combat obesity, Willis said he is most excited about this one.

"Most weight loss camps help people lose weight but they do not address the underlying spiritual issues that led the person to overeat in the first place," Willis said. "As a result, the recidivism rate is more than 50%."

"That's what happens when you separate the Gospel from any social issue. At our camps, we will require applicants to find a local church accountability group to sponsor them with prayer and support. That way, when they return home they can continue to practice what we teach and pass it on to others."

The first camp is tentatively set to begin April 1 at Heritage Farm Museum & Village, an Appalachian historical attraction near Huntington seen on the History Channel's *American Pickers* in December.

"The church preaches about all the so-called seven deadly sins with the exception of gluttony," Willis said. "As a result, we've slowly allowed our waistlines to expand to the point that we are unable to love God with all our strength."

Today we're at a point of a national crisis. The time for the church to get involved is now."